

Castlemaine Naturalist

September 2013

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Fuscous Honeyeater Photo – Noel Young

Barkers Creek Revitalised

Rita Mills

After the grim forecast for Saturday, we thought (well, I did) that the field trip wouldn't happen, but the day was fine and mild, and although it wasn't the planned field trip, several of us had a pleasant wander along Barkers Creek, where it flows through the Harris property. Geraldine generously offered to take us to see what has happened with the plantings that were done back in 2001.

We crossed the paddock just near the start of the roundabout at Harcourt, and wandered downstream to where there are the remains of an old bridge, which sent me reminiscing because I remember walking over it as a girl. It was already unsafe then for our truck to cross. I can't remember what the creek was like then, but some of the big old Red Gums must have been there, and there had been willows, which were removed, before plantings were done with local natives – wattles, eucalypts and melaleucas mainly, and they are doing well. The steep banks of the creek are holding up well, as the cattle are now excluded, and there were quite a few birds and we strolled along to the sound of their calls, and the calls of numerous frogs.

Geoff walked across from their house and joined us about midway, and we headed upstream again, to where we sat down on fallen logs and enjoyed a chat over afternoon tea.

Birds seen during the afternoon were: Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Magpie, Welcome Swallow, Superb Blue Fairy-wren, White-winged Chough, Eastern Rosella, Red Wattlebird, White-plumed Honeyeater, Eastern Shrike-tit, Yellow Robin, Blackbird, and ravens, possibly Little.



Afternoon tea on Barkers Creek

Photo - Noel Young

Barkers Creek Reservoir Reserve Biodiversity Blitz – One not to miss!

The field trip on Saturday 14 September is a special one, and we hope as many Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club members and supporters as possible are able to be there. The excursion is being held in the bushland reserve surrounding the Barkers Creek Reservoir, which is to the north of Harcourt. The two Landcare groups on either side of the reservoir are seeking government funding to undertake significant management and restoration works there. These groups have requested help from the Castlemaine Field Nats to learn more about the plants and animals occurring in the reserve (both native and non-native), which will help them with their grant applications for this funding.

For those interested in attending, you can either meet at the Octopus building on Duke Street (opposite the Castle Motel) for an 11.30am departure, or meet at the picnic area at the reserve itself at 12 midday. Once at the reserve, we'll join up with members of the Harcourt Valley Landcare Group and the Harcourt North / Sedgwick Landcare Group for a casual lunch (BYO). After lunch we'll all go for a walk around the reserve in one or more mixed groups (depending on numbers) to identify the biota occurring there. We expect that the excursion will run through until about 3.30pm.

People of all levels of skill and experience are encouraged to attend; to share your knowledge and learn from others. Bring your cameras and field guides. Contact Chris (c.timewell@hotmail.com) if you would like further details.

Photopoint Project

Connecting Country Event on 24 September 2013

In the late 1990s, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club commenced the Photopoint Project, initially in conjunction with Parks Victoria. Many hundreds of photopoints were established by club members all across the local area, with the intention of later taking repeat photos from each site to look at the changes in vegetation and habitat over time. Some photos of local areas taken prior to 1999 also were retrospectively included in the Photopoint Project, and as such, there are some photopoint locations going back as far as the 1940s.

In recent years, Ern and Lesley Perkins have been revisiting as many of the original photopoint sites as possible. They have taken new photos at the sites that they've rediscovered, and updated the site information as needed. For many reasons, and particularly because of the relatively poor accuracy of GPS units back in the late 1990s, it has not been possible to find many of the original site locations. Others have been found only after much detective work and careful observation. The project now has more than 500 locations and 1500 photographs. Some sites have been revisited as many as five times over the years.

In early 2012, Connecting Country was successful in applying for a *Communities for Nature* grant that included some funding towards the Photopoint Project. Primarily the funding was to be used to print an archive quality copy of each photo so that they could all be lodged with the Castlemaine Historical Society for safe-keeping. However, a skilled Connecting Country volunteer, Cara Byrt, offered to attempt to develop the Photopoint Project information into a user friendly database. Cara and Ern worked together for many weeks and months, and the database is now ready. Anyone with a PC computer can explore all of the project findings that have been recorded to date through a simple program. It's also been developed in a way that new photos and photo locations can be added to it over time.

On the evening of Tuesday 24 September as part of the Annual General Meeting of Connecting Country, the Photopoint Project database DVD will be launched and the archive quality photos handed over to the Castlemaine Historical Society. Free copies of the DVD will be available for all who attend. There will be a demonstration of the database. Ern will also give a presentation on long-term monitoring and the Photopoint Project as part of the evening's event.

The Connecting Country AGM and Photopoint project event will commence from 7pm at the Chewton Senior Citizens and Community Centre (enter via rear car park on Mount St). All are welcome to attend, and Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club members are particularly welcome. Refreshments will be available after the event. Contact Chris Tilmewell if you'd like further information --

[\(chris@connectingcountry.org.au\)](mailto:chris@connectingcountry.org.au)

Kangaroo Island

Nigel Harland

In April this year, Anne and I decided to make the trip to Kangaroo Island together with a friend from Albury. We started with a drive to Portland in time for a pelagic trip. After a disastrous experience on a boat trip to Norfolk Island several years ago I had vowed never to go to sea again, but time goes by and attitudes change. We left at around 7am and the seas weren't too bad. I managed to find a White-faced Storm Petrel, which I had never seen before, but missed the Sooty Albatross, which is an autumn visitor to this part of the world. I managed to cope with the trip reasonably well, but I was not encouraged to make any more pelagic trips.



The following day we made the long drive to the coastal town of Cape Jervis where we caught the last ferry of the day to Kangaroo Island. Then we made the short trip in the dark to Kingscote, which is the largest town on the island. The island itself is around 150km long and 60km deep. Apart from Kingscote, there are few towns and those that there are contain few buildings or inhabitants.

We set out next day for the western end of the island after a short walk around Kingscote, where a few overwintering waders were found on the foreshore. We headed inland, making a short stop at Stokes Bay. Then on to the south west where we stayed at the Western Kangaroo Island caravan park. A good number of birds were seen in the grounds of the park and Bush Stone Curlews were heard at night, but never seen, despite moonlit searches.

Over the next two days we spent much time looking for a Western Whistling Thornbill in the extreme south west corner of the island. I had seen this skulker in the south of Western Australia a few years ago, after a great deal of effort. The call is the give-away, but unfortunately autumn is the one time of year they do not call. We spent many hours around Admirals Arch and despite hearing a couple of calls saw nothing. I did manage a couple of sightings, but unfortunately Anne and Dougald were not in range. I have the habit of dawdling and it paid dividends this time.



There was another spot on the way back near Seal Bay, on the south coast about half way along the island. The coastal scenery along this part of the island was quite spectacular. We stayed in Seal Bay and combed the area with no success. We did happen to find two Hooded Plovers on the coast at Seal Bay and they were quite confiding.

This left just one objective, the local population of the Glossy Black Cockatoo. They are found (with difficulty) in Queensland and Northern New South Wales, with this isolated population on Kangaroo Island. We had discovered the best spot to look for them was at American River at the eastern end of the island. We decided to head there late in the afternoon of our penultimate day there. We had been given a mud map by the Rangers at Flinders Chase in the west. It took some time to find, but eventually we located the spot where locals have erected a substantial number of nesting boxes to try to encourage the diminishing population. Talking to locals it seemed that we had picked the right time of day, as they return from foraging trips just before dark.

They behaved exactly as expected, with a dozen or so birds returning to roost. We tried hard to remain unobtrusive so as not to disturb their routine. Photography under these circumstances proved very difficult because of limited light and the distance between us and the birds. We spent a good time with them, enjoying the experience. We were joined by a local, who explained the conservation measures that were being taken by local residents to preserve the declining population.

Despite the lack of photographic evidence, we came away with a feather of the male bird – kindly given to us by a local resident.



A long trip home, via Port MacDonnell and another pelagic trip (not me this time!) finished off a most enjoyable week. I could recommend a trip to Kangaroo Island, but not in the autumn if you want to find the Whippbird!

The SEANA spring camp is at Numurkah

Hosted by the Broken Creek FNC

Friday 11th to Monday 14th October 2013

Excursions on offer will encompass a Murray cruise, Red Gum forest, Cadell fault (full day geology excursion), Grey Box grassy woodlands, meet with Yorta Yorta people, and a full day birding excursion.

Registration forms from the Secretary, Catherine Rourke
clrourke@gmail.com

A spring odyssey

Noel Young

The first official day of spring was fine and warm, and I threw my gear in the car, determined to see what's happening in the bush. First stop was the Railway Dam, a good bird location, especially at this time of year. Not disappointing - there were Fuscous Honeyeaters chasing each other through the treetops, Crimson Rosellas, White-throated Tree-creepers, Red browed Finch, Rufous Whistler, White-plumed Honeyeater, Dusky Woodswallow fledglings huddled together on an open branch, Black faced Cuckoo-shrike, Eastern Shrike-tit, a Fan-tail Cuckoo calling, Welcome Swallows, Yellow Robin and Superb Blue Wrens. For the first time I can recall, there were no waterbirds on the dam, not even Australasian Grebes.

Then it was off to Newstead to find some wildflowers. I took the Mia Mia track and they were scarce until I reached a good showing on the north facing slopes along Bells Track. Lots of Leopard Orchids, Early Nancy, and a scattering of Blue Caladenia, Pink Fingers, some early showings of Gorse Bitter-pea, Grevillea alpina, and flowering Sundew.



Left: New season Dusky Woodswallows at the Railway Dam

At Bells track -

Right: Leopard Orchids
Diuris pardina

Below left: Early Nancy
Wurmbea dioica

Below right:: Pink Fingers
Caladenia carneae



Wednesday Wildflower Wanders

Commence on September 18, for five weeks

For each Wednesday, an appointed leader* will decide the best location at the time for wildflowers. We generally spend about an hour checking it out. *Volunteers welcome

Meet at the Duke st car park at 4.00 pm. Please be punctual.

Bring your plant brochure/ field guides, camera and notebook

September Guest Speaker – David Gemmell on Birds of Prey

On Friday September 13, the guest speaker at the club's general meeting is raptor enthusiast David Gemmell. From David's fascinating website - <http://www.raptorcapture.com/> - he provides the following summary of his interests and activities:

"I live in Central Victoria and this is where I do most of my filming. However, in order to achieve my objective – which is to film many of Australia's birds of prey, I will be travelling far and wide in the years ahead. Ultimately, I would like to produce a DVD set which showcases the birds in their natural environment – with a focus on capturing nesting and hunting footage."

David's talk promises to have many great photos and video footage from his travels locally and all across the country observing these avian predators, and will be interest to naturalists of all ages (kids included).

Observations

- ◆ **Reports at the August meeting -**
- ◆ Lots of Nodding Greenhood rosettes and other sp. starting to flower at Kaweka; At Eureka, Rough and Golden Wattle out and Tall Greenhoods; at the Quince tree (Gower school area) a lot of Wattlebirds and Fuscous Honeyeaters and little else - Rita Mills
- ◆ Fantail Cuckoo heard at Taradale, and **Yellow-footed Antechinus** seen at Blue Hills near Maldon - Chris Timewell
- ◆ Large flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos seen over Happy Valley, and a plague of Brush-tailed Possums ravaging gardens in the Saint st. area - George Broadway
- ◆ **Other reports:**
- ◆ Gil Smith at Phillip Island observed a Wallaby eating a dead Muttonbird and another Wallaby swimming 10 -15 metres in the bay. An amazing year for Whale sightings - 11 times in the last 3 months
- ◆ George Broadway: Spinebills and Yellow faced Honeyeaters in yard; Fantail Cuckoos heard late August
- ◆ John Alexander sighted several **Hooded Robins** near the Mia Mia track - Rita
- ◆ **A Banded Lapwing** in the Bradford Hills area - Chris Timewell

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

September 2013

Fri September 13 meeting: speaker DAVID GEMMELL - birds of prey

Sat September 14 field trip: Barkers Creek Reservoir Reserve - leader Chris Timewell - joining Landcare group; NB* start 11.30 am at Duke st. or meet at the Res at 12pm for lunch

Wed September 18: First **Wednesday Wildflower Wander** 4pm.

Tues September 24: Connecting Country - photopoint database DVD - 7pm., Chewton Senior Citizens Community Centre

Fri October 11 meeting: speaker IAN WACEY - waterfalls of Victoria

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2013

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2013 Committee

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